

Animal Planet spins tale of “Mermaids: The Body Found”

I have to admit, there's something about the notion of science entertainment that rubs me the wrong way. Maybe it's not the entertainment itself, but the venue in which it's presented. A while back, [Animal Planet](#) presented [Charlie Foley's](#) project [Dragons: A Fantasy Made Real](#), and did very well with it. Now Foley and his team are back with a follow-up. [Mermaids: The Body Found](#) (premiering Sunday, May 27 at 9pm ET/PT) is an engrossing two-hour film supposing that a radical, unknown species of marine life bearing human-like attributes had been found in the stomach of a shark, and in other instances, possibly captured alive by the [Navy](#). It's paranoid. It's fun. *And* it's actually provocative in its approach, weaving a clever interplay of actual historically documented events and fiction to present a story that's eerily compelling — and maybe just a little reckless. I talked to Foley, the film's executive producer and writer, about what he hopes people get out of *Mermaids: The Body Found*.

Channel Guide Magazine: What was your impetus for *Mermaids: The Body Found*?

Charlie Foley: I imagined doing a follow-up [to *Dragons: A Fantasy Made Real*]. And the creature that interested me was the mermaid, and the question of whether or not it ever could have been real. On the one hand, nearly every seafaring culture on Earth has a mermaid myth. So many cultures that never had any contact with one another, which is intriguing — that this is a sort of global myth across the world, with every culture. But then, sort of scientifically, evolutionarily, OK — if that legend were real, how could it have come into being? That question we sort of ask — how do we plausibly imagine this creature? — led us to one of the more radical theories of human evolution, and that's the Aquatic Ape Theory.

CGM: Which — for our readers — is what?

CF: The Aquatic Ape Theory is pretty intriguing. It's pretty radical, and it suggests that humans had an aquatic period in our own evolutionary history. It looks at the differences between people and other animals — terrestrial animals. For instance, we can consciously hold our breath longer than any other animal, to a pretty astonishing degree. We have an insulating layer of fat that's more extensive than any other primate and is more akin to what you find in marine mammals. We're hairless, relatively speaking — the crown on my head, particularly so. Hair is drag in water, and so more advanced marine animals have lost hair. Webbing between our fingers and our toes, which we have more of than other primates. Sweat and salty tears. Most animals have evolved really efficient means of conserving salts in water. We haven't. Why? So the Aquatic Ape Theory posits that all of these differences are because humans had a period, in their evolutionary history, when they were becoming aquatic. ... To me, that was sort of the interesting question. ... If the Aquatic Ape Theory — if there's something to it, what's the logical

extension of it? Where would that have gone if one branch of the human family tree split off and continued going in that direction? And could that be the origin of this shared cultural memory of mermaids? Could it have been real? That's how we began to ground and springboard the story, and the imagination into the story.

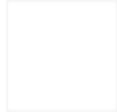
CGM: There's a lot of factual information mixed into the narrative along with the speculation. I'm wondering if a lot of people aren't going to be able to tell where the facts end and where fiction takes over.

CF: First and foremost, we want to tell an entertaining story. And I think telling that convincingly and credibly, and grounding it in some science imbues it with more realism. And I think that makes it more intriguing. We want people to get lost in a world where mermaids could be real, and suspend the disbelief and imagine that this could be a real creature. And hopefully the science is in the service of making that more credible and more convincing. Intersecting the story with some real world phenomena that we do — and real-world theories like the Aquatic Ape Theory — gives it a degree of realism. It makes the story more satisfying. I hope people enjoy the story and get lost in it for a little while, and hopefully allow themselves to wonder and imagine, and enjoy it.

CGM: One of the points your film makes that seems universally true is this notion of humanity constantly searching for other life like us — aliens or whatever — yet we know that we're not very good about coexisting even with ourselves, let alone another species.

CF: The last species that we know that modern humans lived alongside and had encounters with were Neanderthals. And there are a lot of scientists who speculate that we out-competed them — maybe aggressively so. We might actually have even done more pernicious things. That's something, the idea that there could be a fellow human species that would have persisted, and the only place to hide would have been the deep oceans. And "Would that history play out again?" is something that kind of intrigued me.

Whenever I would go into museums of natural history and see the extinct wings, I would always feel so cheated. Because you'd see these marvelous, magical things that were no more. I think a lot of the questions you're asking are making me feel that way. I think people do want to believe that there could be something else out there. And I think it's wondrous to know that some of these things were once real. Some of these incredible animals were once real, and people want to believe in that. And hopefully this is a story that helps people imagine a world where this could have been real, and does it in a way that's entertaining and wondrous, I hope, and satisfying.



Minnie Spencer says:

AUGUST 19, 2012 AT 6:33 PM

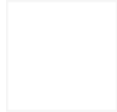
Shame on you AP for making such bullshit! And what's sad is the whales and dolphins probaly are dying from what this so called documentary shows.The government does do the sonar thing and whales and dolphins do get beached from it and it gets covered up and by you doing this it just gives them more reason to continue to do it. Thos kids would have been brainwashed to think it wasn't a mermaid. SHAME SHAME SHAME!!!



Minnie Spencer says:

AUGUST 19, 2012 AT 6:25 PM

I seriously thought this was a real documentary and now that I've found out it's not I'M PISSED!!! I actually didn't know anything about it untill my girlfriend told me about it, then I just HAD to watch it. Shame on you AP for showing a program like this and presenting it as a documentary and knowing all the time it was fake!!!



Brymstone says:

MAY 29, 2012 AT 11:17 AM

If you thought hyping a pseudo-documentary and presenting it with no disclaimers was a wise decision then I've got news for you. You have isolated a large number of viewers that have completely lost respect for this channel. There are enough bullshit shows out there, thank you very much. Please don't let yourselves slip into some silly-ass cross between The Discovery Channel and Sy-Fy.

Oh - and Jeremy Wade rules!!!...



Theresia Huber says:

MAY 28, 2012 AT 10:49 AM

My mother tongue is German, and it really bothered me that the "German" who told the story about seeing a mermaid was in reality an American who admittedly spoke a pretty good German, but what gave it away were "German" phrases that were translated literally from English, and no native German would use them. It was the first clue that the story was made up. And all the scientists' interviews reminded me very much of the Blair Witch Project.